Live Wire Stories of New York Life

By O. Henry

The Greatest Short Story Writer of All

FURNISHED ROOM.

(From "The Four Million," by O. Henry.)
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RESTLESS, shifting, fugacious as time itself is a certain vast bulk of the population of the red brick district of the lower west side.

One evening after dark a young man prowled among these crumbling red mansions, ringing their bells. At the twelfth he rested his lean hand-baggage upon the step and wiped the dust from his hatband and forehead.

He asked if there was a room to let.

"Come in," said the housekeeper. Her voice came from her throat, her throat seemed lined with fur. "I have the third floor back vacant since a week back. Should you wish to look at it?"

The young man followed her up the stairs.

"This is the room," said the housekeeper, from her furry throat.

"Do you have many theatrical people rooming here?" asked the young man.

"They comes and goes. A good proportion of my lodgers is connected with the theatres. Yes, sir, this is the theatrical district. Actor people never stays long anywhere. I get my share. Yes, they comes and they goes."

He engaged the room, paying for a week in advance. He was tired, he said, and would take possession at once. He counted out the money. The room had been made ready, she said, even to towels and water. As the housekeeper moved away he put, for the thousandth time, the question that he carried at the end of his tongue.

"A Young Girl."

"A young girl—Miss Vashner—Miss Eloise Vashner—do you remember such a one among your lodgers? She would be singing on the stage, most likely. A fair girl, of medium height and slender, with reddish, golden hair and a dark mole near her left eyebrow."

"No, I don't remember the name. Them stage people has names they change as often as their rooms. They comes and they goes. No, I don't call that one to mind."

No. Always no. Five months of reckless interrogation and the inevitable negative. So much time spent by day in questioning managers, agents, schools and choruses; by night among the audiences of theatres from all-star casts down to music halls so low that he dreaded to find what he most hoped for. He who had loved her best had tried to find her.

He was sure that since her disappearance from home this great, watergirt city held her somewhere, but it was like a monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of today buried to-morrow in ooze and slime.

The guest reclined, inert, upon a chair, while the room, confused in speech as though it were an apartment in Babel, tried to discourse to him of its divers tenantry.

A polyxenomatic rug like some brilliant-flowered rectangular, tropical islet lay surrounded by a billowy sea of soiled matting.

The young tenant in the chair allowed these thoughts to file, soft-shod, through his mind, while there drifted into the room furnished sounds and furnished scents. He heard in one room a tittering and incontinent, slack laughter; in others the monologue of a scold, the rattling of dice, a lullaby and one crying dully; above him a banjo thrilled with spirit. Doors banged somewhere; the elevated trains roared intermittently; a cat yowled miserably upon a back fence. And he breathed the breath of the house—a dank savor rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults mingled with the reeking exhalations of linoleum and mildewed and rotten woodwork.

She Has Been in This Room!"

Then, suddenly, as he rested there, the room was filled with the strong, sweet odor of mignonette. It came as on a single buffet of wind with such keenness and fragrance and emphasis that it almost seemed a living visitant. And the man cried aloud: "What, dear?" as if he had been called, and sprang up and faced about. The rich odor clung to him and wrapped him around. He reached out his arms for it, all his senses for the time confused and commingled. How could one be peremptorily called by an odor? Surely it must have been a sound. But, was it not the sound that had touched, that had caressed him?

"She has been in this room!" he cried, and he sprang to wrest from it a token, for he knew he would recognize the smallest thing that had belonged to her or that she had touched. This enveloping scent of mignonette, the odor that she had loved and made her own—whence came it?

The room had been but carelessly set in order. Scattered upon the flimsy dresser scarf were half a dozen hairpins—those discreet, indistinguishable friends of womankind, feminine of gender, infinite of mood and uncommunicative of tense. These he ignored, conscious of their triumphant lack of identity. Ransacking the drawers of the dresser he came upon a discarded, tiny, ragged handkerchief. He pressed it to his face. It was racy and insolent with heliotrope; he hurled it to the floor. In another drawer he found odd buttons, a theatre programme, a pawnbroker's card, two lost marshmallows, a book on the divination of dreams. In the last was a woman's black satin hair bow, which halted him poised between ice and fire. But the black satin hair-bow also is femininity's demure, impersonal, common ornament, and tells no tales.

And then he traversed the room like a hound on the scent, skimming the walls, considering the corners of the bulging matting on his hands and knees, rummaging mantel and tables, the curtains and hangings, the drunken cabinet in the corner, for a visible sign, unable to perceive that she was there beside, around, against, within, above him, clinging to him, wooing him, calling him so poignantly through the finer senses that even his grosser ones became cognizant of the call. Once again he answered loudly "Yes, dear!" and turned, wild-eyed, to gaze on vacancy, for he could not yet discern form and color and love and outstretched arms in the odor of mignonette. Oh, God! whence that odor, and since when have odors had a voice to call? Thus he groped.

Baffled!

He burrowed in crevices and corners, and found corks and cigarettes. These he passed in passive contempt. But once he found in a fold of the matting a half-smoked cigar, and this he ground beneath his heel with a green and trenchant oath. He sifted the room from end to end. He found dreary and ignoble small records of many a peripatetic tenant; but of her whom he sought, and who may have lodged there, he found no trace.

And then he thought of the housekeeper.

He ran from the haunted room downstairs and to a door that showed a crack of light. She came out to his knock. He smothered his excitement as best he could.

"Will you tell me, madam," he besought her, "who occupied the room I have before I came?"

"Yes, sir, I can tell ye again. 'Twas Sprowls and Mooney. I said. Miss Bretta Sprowls it was in the theatres, but Missis Mooney she was. My house is well known for respectability. The marriage certificate hung, framed, on a nail over"——

"What kind of a lady was Miss Sprowls—in looks, I mean?"

"Why, black-haired, sir, short and stout, with a comical face. They left a week ago Tuesday."

"And before they occupied it?"

The Mystery.

"Why, there was a single gentleman connected with the draying business. He left owing me a week. Before him was Missis Crowder and he, two children, that stayed four months, and back of them was old Mr. Doyle, whose sons paid for him. He kept the room six months. That goes back a year, sir, and further I do not remember."

He thanked her and crept back to his room. The room was dead. The essence that had vivified it was gone. The perfume of mignonette had departed. In its place was the old, stale odor of mouldy house furniture, or atmosphere in storage.

The ebbing of his hope had drained his faith. He sat staring at the yellow, singing gaslight. Soon he walked to the bed and began to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drove them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. When all was snug and taut he turned out the light, turned the gas full on again and laid himself gratefully upon the bed.

It was Mrs. McCool's night to go with the can for beer. So she fetched it and sat with Mrs. Purdy in one of those subterranean retreats where housekeepers foregather and the worm dieth seldom.

"I rented out my third floor back this evening," said Mrs. Purdy across a fine circle of foam. "A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago."

"Now, did ye, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am?" said Mrs. McCool, with intense admiration. "You do be a wonder for rentin' rooms of that kind. And did ye tell him, then?" she concluded in a husky whisper, laden with mystery.

"Rooms," said Mrs. Purdy, in her farriest tones, "are furnished for to rent. I did not tell him, Mrs. McCool."

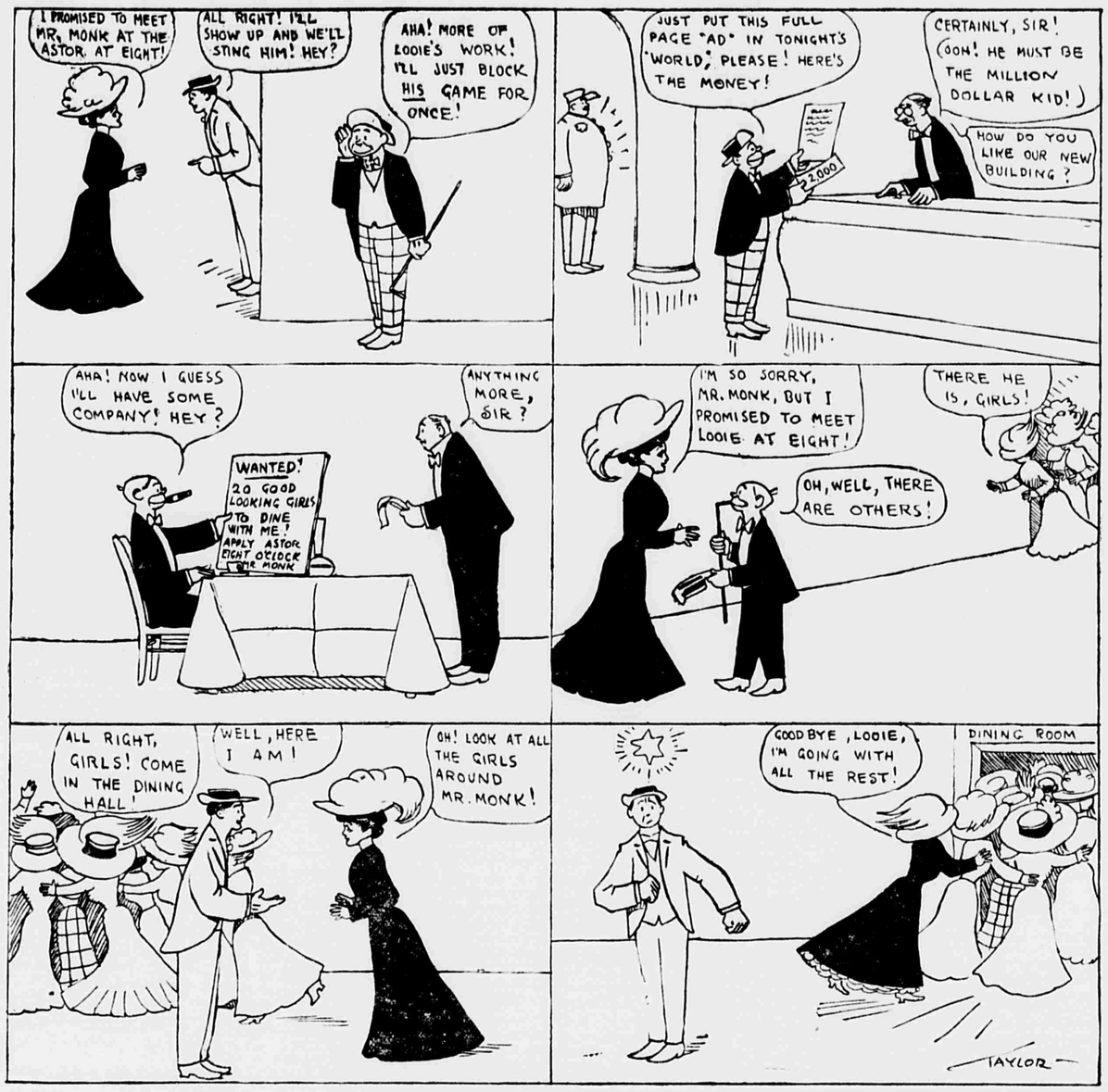
"'Tis right ye are, ma'am; 'tis by renting rooms we kape alive. Ye have the rale sense for business, ma'am. There be many people will rayjict the rentin' of a room if they be tould a suicide has been after dyin' in the bed of it."

"As you say, we has our living to be making," remarked Mrs. Purdy.

"Yis, ma'am; 'tis true. 'Tis just one wake ago this day I helped ye lay out the third floor back. A pretty slip of a colleen she was to be killin' herself wid the gas—a swate face she had, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am."

"She'd a-been called handsome, as you say," said Mrs. Purdy, assenting, but critical, "but for that mole she had a-growin' by her left eyebrow. Do fill up your glass again, Mrs. McCool."

The Million Dollar Kid -:- -:- -:- By R. W. Taylor



Betty Vincent Gives Advice On Courtship and Marriage

The Hostess's Place.

Dear Betty:

I HAVE received an invitation to a party to be held on Decoration Day. As I have received invitations of this kind before, and have not had such a nice time, I would like you to tell me what games would be nice to play. The guests range from sixteen to eighteen years of age. T. B.

It is the hostess's place to arrange the games, not yours. She no doubt arranged for her guests to have a good time, and if you accept her invitation you should abide by her plans.

She Is Not Worth While.

Dear Betty:

I AM deeply in love with a young lady of twenty-one, and have called on her and taken her to places of amusement twice a week for eight or nine months. She never spoke of loving any one else and was always most friendly and nice with me. Last night I went to her home and found her love-making with another man. She hardly spoke to me, and kissed him several times in my presence. I telephoned her to-day and she said I was "a silly boy to mind him," but I know he is not related to her. I have a good business and had hoped to marry this girl. What would you advise me? I am all broke up over it. J. S.

I do not think the girl is worth while, as she seems fickle and displayed extreme bad taste in kissing the other man in your presence. I would not pay her attentions for a few weeks, and if she really prefers you she will see that you disapprove of her behavior and refuse to play second fiddle to the other man. Though you feel very badly over the affair I think it best that you discovered the fickle nature of the girl before you married her.

Her Parents Know Best.

Dear Betty:

I AM a girl of eighteen and I go with a lady friend. My parents disapprove of her very much, but as we have gone together for two years I hate to give her up. My mother says that if I persist in going with her any longer she does not want to have me in the house. I do not wish to part with my friend, neither do I want to go from the house, so will you please advise what to do? HEARTBROKEN.

Your parents know what is best. They must have good reason to disapprove of your friend, whom they evidently do not consider a fit companion for you. Remember that your mother is your best friend and wants to do what is best for you, so I advise you to give up this friend and seek other companions.

Can you show how this young couple rode from Erie to Philadelphia, passing but once through each of the twenty-two towns?

An Announcement.

Dear Betty:

KINDLY tell me how soon before the wedding should the announcements be sent out, and how they should read. INQUIRER.

Announcements of a wedding are not sent out until after the wedding. They read: "Mr. and Mrs. James Jones announce the marriage of their daughter Mary to John Brown on May 12, 1908." The place of the ceremony is also mentioned.

Schoolboys.

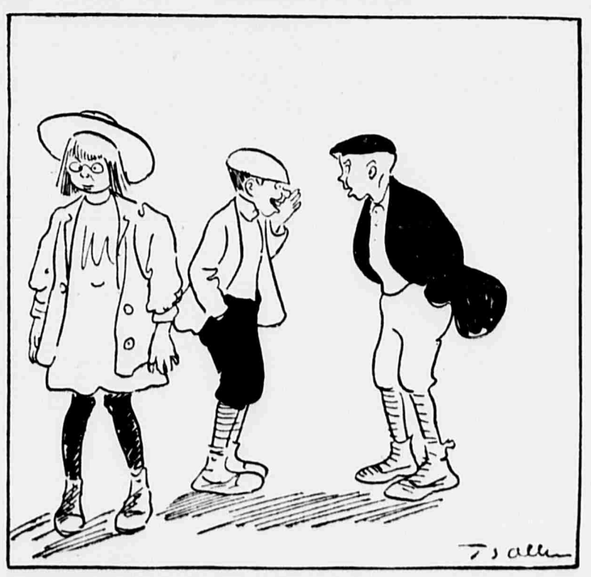
Dear Betty:

I AM sixteen and am very particular about my boy friends. I have quite a number. I am considered a pretty girl and am liked a great deal. At one of the school dances a boy to whom I have not been introduced, but who has studied in the same hall with me a whole term, and who has bowed to me when I pass him on the street, came up and asked me for a dance. I didn't have any dance to give him, as my card was all filled. Would it have been right for me to have given him a dance, and is it right for me to bow to him when I meet him on the street? Another young man who lives a block from us, and who sees me every day, smiles and bows. Shall I bow back? E. M. G. R.

I think it would have been proper to dance with the boy, as he is a schoolmate and you bow to him when you meet. It is perfectly proper to bow to the boys of your school who are in your classes, but I do not think it advisable to return the bow of the young man whom you meet each day on your way to and from school.

Wisdom of the Young -:- -:- By T. S. Allen

"Goodness, Maggie, are you going to clip that dog?"
"Nope! I'm just getting some of those fashionable puffs for me hair."



"Gee, Bill! wot'd yer git engaged to her for? Why, she's cross-eyed, knock-kneed and homely as er mud fence."
"I know it; but just tink how safe she will be!"

Reflections of a Bachelor Girl.

By Helen Rowland.

HELEN ROWLAND

WHOM the gods wish to destroy they first infatuate with a chorus girl.

The trouble with the marriage tie is that it's so tight that most people get tangled up or frazzled out trying to loosen it.

When a young man rails at marriage, listen for the wedding bells; a confirmed bachelor is too indifferent on the subject to be bitter about it.

A man doesn't think he has had a good time unless he has a headache the next morning.

When a girl refuses a man his chagrin is always tempered with astonishment that she could be so blind to her own good fortune.

It's the men who are least particular about their own morals who are the most particular about a woman's; if Satan should come up here seeking a wife, he would probably demand an angel with gilt wings instead of a nice congenial little devil.

The Romance Of Love-Making

By Thornton Hall.

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS. The earlier instalments described the romantic and unusual beginnings of famous men's love affairs (the love stories of Washington, Franklin, Garibaldi, Rinaldi, etc.); the history and philosophy of kissing and certain strange ways whereby wives have been wooed and won. Historic love-letters form the theme of one chapter, and celebrated fictional proposals of marriage are cited in another.

CHAPTER VII.

(Continued.)

How the Ladies Propose in Fiction—Also the Men.

SIR PITT CRAWLEY'S wooing of Rebecca Sharp in "Vanity Fair" was of the imperative order which sometimes succeeds where milder methods would fail.

"I tell you I want you," said Sir Pitt. "Will you come back, yes or no?"

"I daren't. I don't think it would be right to be alone with you, sir," Becky said, seemingly in great agitation.

"I say again I want you," Sir Pitt said, thumping the table. "I can't get on without you. All my accounts 'as got muddled without you. You must come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come."

"Come as what, sir?" Rebecca gasped out.

"Come as Lady Crawley, if you like."

"Oh, sir," she said, "I'm married already."

The lover, however, who prefers a direct, simple, manly proposal could scarcely do better than copy that of Prof. Emanuel to Lucy Snow: "Lucy, take my love," he said. "One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth." In these words there is a good, honest ring which is worth more than reams of rhapsodies and sentiment.

Sir Charles Grandison's proposal, it will be remembered, runs through several pages of stately and dignified prose, closing thus: "I must flatter myself with the honour of Miss Byron's whole heart, as well as with the approbation of all her friends. I cannot be thought at present to deserve it; but it shall be the endeavour of my life to do."

That there is as great a gulf between the proposal of fiction and of fact as between the courtly and long-winded "Grandisons" of the era of powder and patches and the wooer of to-day is proved by the following extract from a recent story by Mr. Keble Howard.

Love in a Cab.

"Capital!" exclaimed the brilliant young novelist, laying down his pen. He had just written a proposal of marriage scene. It was dignified, earnest, eloquent on the man's part, tender, gentle, affecting on the part of the girl.

As he dressed for dinner the young novelist wondered why men made such a fuss about a very simple matter. If Doris were dining with the Russells he would certainly ask her to be his wife.

Fate was with him. Not only did he sit next to Doris at dinner, but the family brougham being smaller after dinner than before, his suggestion that he and she should follow on to the Jowitts' in a hansom was accepted with alacrity by Doris's mother. Now for it.

"D'you feel cold?" asked Doris.

"Not a bit. Why?"

"I thought you were shivering."

"Oh, no, thanks."

A bad start. They were on the wrong plane. He must begin by raising the tone of the conversation.

"What a wonderfully bright star," he breathed gently.

"Which one?"

"The one over there. Don't you see it?"

"Oh, yes, straight between the horse's ears. By the way, whereabouts is the 'Great Bear?'"

"Don't know."

"You needn't get cross, anyway," said Doris. "I didn't mean to worry you."

"You're not worrying me, only we're wasting time."

"How shockingly rude."

"You don't understand. I want to ask you something."

"I'm not a bit good at riddles."

"Oh, it isn't a riddle." The Jowitts' door was in sight. "It's—look here! Will you marry me?"

"Will I what?"

"Only marry me—that's all."

"Of course, you old duffer. I always meant to."

CHAPTER VIII.

How the Men Actually Propose.

"Oh, not happy day,
From the shining fields;
Go, not happy day,
Till the maiden yields."
—TENNYSON.

IF the lover in actual life falls short in other respects of his rival in fiction, he is at least his equal in the range and resourcefulness of his methods.

"You're none so young as you once were," said a blunt and undiplomatic lover to the lady of his choice; "you're not much to look at, but you're a good worker. You'd better take me. I'm willing to have you, and you mightn't get another chance." What the good lady answered history unfortunately does not say, but one cannot help hoping that the churlish lover was summarily dismissed to learn how a lady ought to be won.

A Blunt Wooer.

Even Dr. Johnson's method of wooing was open to objection on the score of bluntness. Happily, however, his heart was softer than his tongue. "My dear woman," said the great man to the lady whom he designed to lead to the altar, "I am a hard-working man, and withal something of a philosopher. I am, as you know, very poor. I always have been respectable myself; but I grieve to tell you that one of my uncles was hung." "I have less money than you," answered the lady; "but I shall try to be philosophical, too. None of my relatives ever were hung, but I have several who ought to be." "Providence and philosophy have evidently mated us, my good woman," said the doctor, as he printed a kiss on the brow of his bride-elect.

No one who knew Dr. Abernethy could ever picture him in the character of a sentimental lover, and he certainly did not belie his reputation. He had only once set eyes on Miss Anna Threlfall when he made up his mind that she was the wife for him. "Dear Madam," he wrote to her, "I am much too busy a man to have time for love-making; but I should like to marry you, and shall be glad to learn your decision before the end of the week."

Not a Sentimental Lover.

Even more unsentimental and practical was the proposal addressed by an old bachelor, sick of housekeeping cares, to a lady whom he chose to honor. "My very dear lady," he wrote, "in spite of a large salary, three housekeepers have left me within the year. Will you accept the post without the salary? I remain, dear madam, your lover, ——."

Equally unromantic, if less abrupt, was Dean Swift's proposal to Miss Waring, conveyed in a long "ultimatum," from which the following are typical extracts: "Are you in a condition to manage domestic affairs with an income of less than three hundred pounds a year? Will you be ready to engage in those methods I shall direct for the improvement of your mind, so as to make us entertaining company for each other, without being miserable when we are neither visiting nor visited? Shall the place where your husband is thrown be more welcome than courts and cities without him? . . . Cleanliness in person and competence in fortune are all I look for. . . . I singled you out at first from the rest of women, and I expect not to be used like a common lover."

But perhaps even such an uncomplimentary offer as this suggests more possibilities of romance than that of Rowland Hill when he begged a lady to accept him as "a poor worm in the character of a minister of Christ."

The continuation of this chapter will be found in to-morrow's Evening World.

May Manton's Daily Fashions.

ONE piece garments are greatly in favor just now, and the children's dresses unquestionably have much to commend them. They are so simple that making becomes a trivial matter, they launder with ease and with success, yet they are becoming and attractive withal. This one can be made from linen, gingham, chambray, percale, any of the pretty printed washable fabrics, and, indeed, from anything of a similar nature. In the illustration the belt, the shoulder straps and the cuffs are of embroidery, while the material is pale blue linen.

The quantity of material required for the medium size (4 years) is 2 1-8 yards 24, 1 7-8 yards 32, or 1 5-8 yards 44 inches wide.

Pattern No. 5969 is cut in sizes for children of 2, 4 and 6 years of age.

Child's One-Piece Dress.—Pattern No. 5969.

How to Obtain These Patterns. Call or send by mail to THE EVENING WORLD MAY MANTON FASHION BUREAU, No. 132 East Twenty-third street, New York. Send 10 cents in coin or stamps for each pattern ordered.

IMPORTANT—Write your name and address plainly, and always specify size wanted.